



Westwood Horizons News

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Passover Traditions



Passover is an eight day Jewish holiday of Biblical origin, marking the birth of the Jews as a people and their emergence as a unique nation in

history. It celebrates the liberation of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt over 3000 years ago, under the leadership of Moses.

The main symbol of "Pesach," or Passover, is the Matzah. It is actually a double symbol. It is called "lechem oni," but this expression has been interpreted by the Talmud in two very different ways.

One is that it means "poor man's bread," because it is the only type of bread that a poor man can afford. It is the bread of slaves, and had been eaten by the Jewish people in Egypt long before their redemption. It is, in this sense, a symbol of slavery.

On the other hand, it can be translated as "bread over which much can be said." This is a reference to the role of Matzah as an ingredient of and as a symbol of the deliverance of the Jewish people.

The Haggadah is the text which is used for the Seder and which has been used for at least a thousand years. One of the fascinating and suggestive features of the Haggadah is the prominence of the number

"Four" which appears in connection with the following elements of the Haggadah: The Four Cups of Wine, The Four Questions, The Four Sons, and the Four Expressions of Redemption. Why the number "Four" is given this prominence, and what its special connection with Pesach is, is not obvious.

Perhaps it is because of the four seasons, and the fact that Pesach is the Holiday of Spring, the season of rebirth and renewal, and the birth of the Jewish People with its liberation from Egypt and its march towards Sinai. Or perhaps it is the connection to the four "Imahot," the "Mothers" of the Jewish People: Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah, and the wives and mothers in Egypt and throughout Jewish History, who have kept the spirit of the Jewish people alive.

The Seder is a ritual banquet which reenacts the Exodus, conducted on both the first and second evenings of Passover. Its major feature is the reading of the Haggadah, which relates, in detail, the events of the Exodus of the Jewish people from ancient Egypt, complete with symbolic reenactments using Kosher wine, specially prepared Matzah, and bitter herbs. The bitter herbs commemorate the harsh conditions of slavery in ancient Egypt. The Seder is a traditional occasion for Jewish families to gather together to reinforce their ties to Judaism.

The Jewish people around the world follow these and other Passover customs. However, the same meaning holds true. Passover symbolizes freedom and the rebellion against oppression.